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ABSTRACT

Noting that no clear and adequate basis for a theory of translation exists at this time, this article examines problems common to three fundamental elements of translation. Illustrative examples, taken from Slavic languages, relate to discussion of grammatical, semantic-lexical, and stylistic aspects of translation. Various contributions of linguistics are mentioned. (RL)

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LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS IN THE WORK OF THE TRANSLATOR

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During recent years linguistics has made considerable methodological progress. Linguistics became one of the leading and exact sciences of the humanities. However, we still have no clear and adequate basis for the theory of translation. Moreover, this is surprising, since there is a growing need for translations arising from rapid development of science and technology. Results of Machine Translations are still unsatisfactory. The main difficulties in this field lie not so much on the side of technologists as on the side of linguists.

Therefore we want to meditate for a moment, what results have we from past successes in linguistics, which can help to solve problems in translation, and what basic postulates we can introduce under the auspices of linguists, for the solution of these problems.

From the linguistic point of view we can favor three aspects in translation: i) grammatical, ii) semantic-lexical and iii) stylistic. We can not consider these three mentioned aspects as three distinct stages in the work of a translator. The process of translation is one, and the above aspects are realized in the same time. We favor them on purely conventional grounds. Let us consider the mentioned aspects in more detail.

1. The grammatical aspect

Every language, be it a so-called primitive language or a developed language, has historically formed grammatic categories. They express syntactic reltionships of particular word-forms. It is indifferent for us now what relationships exist between grammatic categories and historical circumstances of the development of the ethnic group. It is important for us that among those categories are such categories which are common with other languages and such categories which are characteristic for only one given language. The categories characteristic for one language present the most difficulties in translation. Let us cite a few examples. In the Bulgarian language there is a special conjugation category of direct witness. We use one form when talking about past events when the speaker was a direct witness of an event, while another form is used when the speaker did not see the event about which he is speaking:

W magazina imat nowi čorapi - W magazina imali nowi čorapi.

In the Russian language there is the category of the present passive participles unknown to other Slavic languages. For example:

čitaemaja kniga - a book which is being read

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In the Polish language for two hundred years there has been so-called masculine-personal category which has its forms in the plural in all the flexional parts of speech. All the world was divided here into men and into 'non-men' meaning everything else. In Polish we say:

1. ci dobrzy panowie byli (...)

but 2. te dobre panie były (...)

3. te dobre dzieci były (...)

4. te dobre konie były (...)

5. te dobre stoły były (...)

The nominal and verbal forms are the same for the names of the women, children, animals and things. The forms used for the men are in distinct opposition to the above.

The perfective and imperfective aspect of the verb is characteristic for all Slavic languages. In every sentence of a Slavic language there is the information on whether the action is, will be, or was completed or not.

The categories discussed so far in Bulgarian, Russian and Polish are untranslatable into other languages by grammatical means. However this matter should not be considered hopeless. The lexical means, especially the so-called model lexical means, can help us exceedingly in this regard. We must always remember that the grammatical categories which are constitutive for one language may become irrelevant for another language. If we attempt to translate these specific categories of language A we must use wider, more general categories in language B. In this regard we may face dangers of semantic nature. If we use in the target language the wider, more general category, then in doing so we impoverish the content existing in the grammatical categories of the source language. For example the simple English sentence:

Did you phone them

could be translated into Polish in 9 different ways:

1. Czy telefonowałeś do nich?
2. Czy telefonawałaś do nich?
3. Czy telefonowaliś ci do nich?
4. Czy telefonowałyście do nich?
5. Czy pan telefonował do nich?
6. Czy panowie telefonowali do nich?
7. Czy pani telefonowała do nich?
8. Czy panie telefonowały do nich?
9. Czy państwo telefonowali do nich?

The differences between the sentences in the Polish language are very clear. In the first sentence we are talking to a person who is a male and with whom we are informal; in the second sentence to a person who is a female and with whom we are informal; in the third to persons who are males and with whom we are informal, in the fourth to persons who are females and with whom we are informal, in the fifth to a person who is a male and whom we address formally, in the sixth to persons who are males and whom we address formally, in the seventh to a person who is a female and whom we address formally, in the eigth to persons who are females and to whom we address formally and in the ninth to persons who are males and females and whom we address formally.

We can see that the category of grammatical gender, the category of number and the fact of formal and informal relations form nine different constructions in Polish whose functions are expressed by one construction in English. If we want to translate the English sentence -- Did you phone them? adequately into Polish we must know the extra linguistic situation. This fact tells us that the antological categories dominate over the language categories. The English construction -- Did you phone them? in comparison to any Polish construction has wider denotation but narrower content. The non-equivalence of the content of grammatical categories of the source language could be compensated in the target language by means of changes in their denotations and visa-versa the non-equivalence of denotation could be compensated by means of content. The knowledge of these facts is important in translations.

2. Semantic-lexical aspect

The mutual relation between denotation and content of the language sign is a central problem not only in comparing two grammatical systems but also in comparing two lexical systems, because the use of the word or word-form is none other than a transposition of a potential content into actual denotation. Here we have the end of the parallel between the grammatical and lexical system. The grammatical system is internally compact and closed. On the other hand, the lexical system is open and its internal cohesion is minimal. There are four factors which still complicate matters. 1) We have no definition of the term lexical unit. From the theoretical point of view this is a great weakness. 2) In the lexicon there are many levels which we can favor from the point of view of chronology, geography, environment and style. 3) The lexical unit can be polysemantic and the polysemy can have different directions in different languages. 4) We still do not have any criteria of classification of the particular meaning of the lexical unit. If we disregard the above difficulties and deal with the basic meaning of the lexical unit of a particular language, we will still have many other difficulties. Two other points may be in order. The world is classified in many different ways by language consciousness. In other words the language consciousness of a particular ethnic group interprets part of reality in different ways and gives them language signs -- that is names. This process depends on the historical circumstances of a particular group and on the level of its historical social development.

Reality, and especially the results of human work are in constant evolution which causes constant changes in the lexicon. For this reason there is no denotational and contentual equivalent of words in different languages. Even if the historical circumstances were the same and constant for all the ethnic groups the differences in denotation and in content would still exist. Let me cite one example. The universal character and biological formal constancy is a characteristic feature of the family reltaionship. In every monogamic family, not depending upon nationality and history, there are such relations as father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, father's brother, mother's brother, etc. It could appear that in all the languages there are full and adequate lexical correspondences naming the same family relations in the same way everyhwere at all times. But this is not so. The family relations interpreted by the language consciousness of the different ethnic groups have very important differences. For example, the word -ziec in Polish means the daughter's husband while in Russian zjat' means as well as the daughter's husband also the sister's husband. The word neffe in German means as well as the son of a brother, also the son of a sister who in Polish are named bratanek and siostrzeniec. The three different names in Polish ciotka, stryjenka, wujenka, have one name in English namely aunt. In Hungarian there are no basic terms like brother and sister, however there are names which designate separately the older brother batya and the younger brother öcs(ém) and separate the older sister nőver and the younger sister húg. It is obvious from this that although the family relationships are the same, the way and denotation of their name differentiation could be different in various languages. These differences could be observed in one given language as well, if we regard the historical or geographical aspects.

The lack of contential and denotational equivalence of lexical units in different languages very often causes the translator to be satisfied when he uses words which are only partly equivalent to the lexical unit of the source language. This is again a problem of the relation between the content and denotation of the word. We can suggest only the following general theoretical advice. The translator can use the word with a wider denotation, thus with a narrower content but never visa versa.

We will not discuss the very interesting problem of idioms whose meaning is not the sum of the meaning of its elements, but we will indicate one more feature of the language sign. The question is that the words as lexical units always have general character but their use has individual character. One can say that here, there is the reason for all the semantical changes. Hegel's conflict between the general meaning of the word and its individual use could be solved in the translation only through the resignation from the features connected with this individual use. If so the translation loses its important features which leads to the picture becoming less expressive than the picture of the source language.

Words are not only the signs of the given classes of designates; this means that they are not only in the given conventional relation to reality but also they are the elements of a language system. Therefore,

words in most cases have morphological structure. This structure could have different levels of complexity and different motivations. Fortunately, this fact does not present a big problem for the translator on the semantic-lexical plane.

3. The stylistic aspect

We shall now proceed to discuss the most difficult aspect of translation, namely the stylistic aspect. In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding I want to comment that I consider stylistics as a part of linguistics.

The goal of stylistics is to analyse the text from the point of view of usefulness of word-forms. In other words to analyse their expressive and impressive functions. This analysis could deal with all the field of linguistics, phonetics, morphology, syntax and lexicology. The first main aim is to show a clear division between grammatical norms and stylistic norms. The concept of stylistic norms was first introduced, as far as I know, by Professor Z. Klemensiewicz in 1968. According to him we could describe the stylistic norms and the elements which comprise these norms. In any opinion this is the most important direction in which our work should be concentrated. The delay in doing research in this field in Slavic language is obvious.

The second main aim is to describe the basic stylistic types of a particular language. The problem is very difficult, and different for almost each language. In Czech there is a great difference between spoken and written language, which is not evident in other Slavic languages. The stylistic value of Turkish loan-words in Serbo-Croatian or in Bulgarian is different from the stylistic value of the same loan-words in Ukrainian or Slovak.

The Polish adjective mały has 67 diminutive forms. If we would want to translate these Polish forms into English we would use the English adjective very little, only. We can observe this kind of difference in one language too. Several years ago I took part in translating Pigmalion by Shaw into Polish. We know that this drama contains many word-forms which are very characteristic from the point of view of stylistics. We wanted to preserve the expressive and impressive character of the drama. Therefore we used many elements from Warsaw slang. In Warsaw this drama was received very positively. One year later the same version of Shaw's drama was presented in another Polish city, Cracow. The Warsaw slang used in the translation was not understood in Cracow and we must remember that the difference between the language of Warsaw and Cracow is very insignificant.

We still have no criteria for distinguishing the different types of style. In the Polish, Soviet and Czech works we can meet the following types of style. 1) colloquial, 2) artistic, 3) scientific, 4) administrative, 5) journalistic and 6) the style of public speaking. This

classification is not exhaustive, on the other hand, it is not exact. This is a result of the complexity and the multiple-level of styles. The stylistic types do not form closed isolated systems but on the contrary they complement and intersect each other.

V.V. Vinogradov correctly writes that if we can speak about different stylistic types in a language, we do this only because separate characters of style determine certain structures of language means. Those structures have functional character and they are socially realized. They are composed mainly from the lexical and syntactical elements which we can investigate linguistically.

Dictionaries and atlases of Slavic Dialects prepared now in all the Slavic languages will be very helpful for the work of the translator. The one-language dictionaries of synonyms, idioms, provincialisms, archaisms are necessary. All the lexicon of a given language should be collected in one great thesaurus which should contain not only full grammatic and semantic features of the word, but also stylistic qualificators. In many cases this would facilitate the good work of a translator. No Slavic language has yet such a dictionary. Statistical research of stylistic phenomena could be useful too.

Our considerations about the stylistic aspect of translation is not sufficient. My main concern was to review central problems from the linguistic point of view only. These problems demand similar attention from the view of historical literary stylistics which is above all interesting in artistic style and its function in the literary work and versification.

During the 7th International Congress of Slavists to be held in Warsaw in 1973 stylistic problems will be discussed in a separate section between linguists and historians of literature. This project will undoubtedly be a useful undertaking.

The conclusions of my paper are the following. The knowledge of linguistic problems play a very important role in translating. In my opinion the results of research in contrastive grammar, typology of languages and lexicology in its broad sense, are the most helpful for the translator. Although linguistics has enjoyed successes in the past it has before it many unsolved problems of great importance, also to the translator. The theory of translation should be further developed in close collaboration between the linguists, theoreticians and historians of literature.